

## RELIGIOUS VIEWS OF NAPOLEON.

{From our Correspondent.}

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Did Napoleon become a Christian in his last years?

All men are equal before God, I know. 'There is no respect of persons with God' as the Apostle remarks, quoting Moses (Rom. ii. 11. comp. Deut. x. 17.) and the meanest beggar, if advanced in the life of faith, is greater in the eyes of the Lord than an illustrious conqueror, who has but a faint and feeble piety. Still we feel deep interest in knowing what were the religious sentiments of those who have changed the face of the world, or who have acquired by their genius a distinguished place in the history of mankind. It is not mere curiosity; we are pleased, we are proud of the Christianity which we profess, when we learn that the most celebrated men have bent the knee before its divine revelations.

Surely, we have all asked more than once: Did Napoleon die an infidel, or a Christian? Did this extraordinary warrior, who, for eighteen years, appeared in the world as the instrument of Providence to punish the nations and to effect vast changes,—did he bow his haughty head at the foot of the cross, and open his heart to the truths of the Gospel? It is difficult to answer this question with entire satisfaction. The admirers of Napoleon (and among them are many bishops and priests,) have perhaps forged false facts, or exaggerated true facts to exalt their hero. But however doubtful, it is interesting to collect whatever can throw any light upon the religious views of this great man, and I will now bring to your view some documents little known, which have been lately published by a French journal.

Let us first cast a rapid glance, since the occasion offers, at the life of Napoleon considered in regard to religion.

Bonaparte, being born in the island of Corsica, of parents originally from Italy, and having an uncle who was a priest, received in early life religious instruction. It is probable that his mother sought to instil into his mind a respect for the doctrines of piety; for the Corsicans are, in general, more attached to the Romish church than the French; and even now preserve some antiquated superstitions for which they profess a singular veneration. Young Bonaparte, raised among such a people, must necessarily have imbibed in childhood more or less of their ideas. But these first impressions do not seem to have lasted long. He was soon sent to a military school in France, at a time when the infidel philosophy of Voltaire and Rousseau had gained an almost universal assent. He everywhere heard the doctrines of religion scoffed at and ridiculed; and how could a young officer, who had doubtless little studied theological subjects, resist the contagion of scepticism?

From the military school, Bonaparte passed immediately to the field of battle. There, deafened by the noise of war, constantly engaged in scenes of carnage, urged onward by the incentives of ambition, his heart was too full of visible things to be occupied with invisible things. We do not find in the history of Napoleon that, during his brilliant campaigns in Italy, he paid any attention to religious subjects. He showed no more deference to the pope as a temporal prince, than to other sovereigns. He even consented to the abduction of Pius VI, who died on his way, overcome with fatigue and grief. Afterwards, when he went to Egypt, he tried to gain the Mahometans by speaking their language, and some at the time said that he embraced the religion of the false prophet. But this was not true; the conqueror of Egypt only made use of the language of the Koran to gain a more easy triumph: a trick of state too often employed by earthly rulers.

Having become master of France, and being clothed with the title of *first consul*, Bonaparte made, it is true, a formal agreement with the pope, and restored the exercise of worship. But it would be wrong to seek in such acts a proof of personal piety. He merely wished, according to all appearance, to strengthen his dominion. The priests were only his agents, charged to preach to the people, in the cities and villages, obedience to the will of Napoleon. He had subsequently violent quarrels with pope Pius VII; and in their long and lamentable discussions, we discover nothing in the emperor which shows a man plausibly submissive to the injunctions of the holy see. On the contrary, Napoleon had formed the plan of making the pope a simple *patriarch*, who would have been subjected to his authority.

Continual wars filled up his reign. During this time religion was probably far removed from his heart; and if it sometimes pressed itself upon his attention, it was in a transient and vague manner. It has been remarked that, in

this part of his career, he showed often a kind of belief in *fatalism*. He spoke of his *star*, to those who surrounded him; he confided in this *star*; he said, after a great victory, that he had been once more protected by his *star*. When he met with a reverse, he laid it upon his mysterious *star*, which he considered as presiding over all his actions. Strange and superstitious notion, borrowed from the astrology of the dark ages, but explicable when we look at the life of Napoleon.

He had passed through such a variety of fortune, had risen from so humble a condition to so lofty an eminence, he had so often obtained splendid victories that he must believe—either in a special blessing of divine Providence,—or in the magic influence of a *star*. But as the idea of a Providence was not in his thoughts, he had adopted the notion of a blind destiny which, under the name of *star*, controlled all his actions. It is remarkable that almost all illustrious have been believers in *fatalism*. Is there then, in the chances of battle, in the uncertainty of victory, in the triumphs achieved by force of arms, some undefinable impression which impels men to regard themselves as the slaves of an unknown and irresistible power?

Terrible disasters drove Napoleon from his throne; I will not relate them here: the world has resounded with them. The moment came then for the illustrious captain to examine himself, to listen to the voice of conscience, to feel his utter weakness, and perhaps to turn his thoughts to God. His old friends had abandoned him, his power was gone, the din with which he had been surrounded was hushed. He was alone with some companions of his misfortune,—he was more wretched than can be told. Was it not to be hoped that these severe trials would soften his hard heart, and lead him to seek in the religion of Christ the only consolation adequate to his adversity?

Some persons thought so. An eminent Christian of England, the Rev. Dr. David Bogue, sent to the prisoner of St. Helena a copy of his *Essay on the divine authority of the New Testament*. Napoleon read this little work with interest and satisfaction. The proofs cited by the author in favor of the divinity of Christianity convinced him, as eye-witnesses attest. True, this was not enough to make him a Christian, but it was enough to awaken in him serious reflections. After Napoleon's death, this copy of the *Essay* was given to an under officer, a pious man, who had taught English to the children of the Emperor's companions. When the regiment returned to England, this same copy was given back to Dr. Bogue, who received it with much emotion, as a new testimony of the favor of God upon his book.

Another fact:—Napoleon had asked to have a chaplain, and the Italian abbot, Bonavita, was selected to perform this office. It seems that he was an enlightened and liberal man: a rare thing among the abbots of Italy. Coming to Belgium, he became acquainted with an Englishman, a zealous friend of Bible societies, and travelled with him to London. The Englishman took occasion to hand Bonavita a splendid copy of the Bible, with the request that he would give it to the unhappy emperor. The abbot accepted this Bible with gratitude, and promised that he would recommend Napoleon to read it diligently. In fact, well-informed men attest that after the arrival of Bonavita at St. Helena, Napoleon read much in the Bible, and that he spoke of it with profound respect.

Who can tell the influence which this divine book exerted upon the soul of the illustrious prisoner? Was he not prepared by misfortune to receive and to feel the great consolations of the Word of God? Is it not allowable to hope that the Lord, after having so severely punished, deigned to make him understand these revelations which would be as a balm to his wounds? We know that the Father of mercies calls laborers into his vineyard even at the eleventh hour, and that he takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should repent and live.

I come to a third fact. During the residence of Napoleon at St. Helena, there was a religious revival among the inhabitants of the island, and it extended to the soldiers. They held a religious meeting for exhortation and prayer a few

steps only from the humble dwelling of the Emperor. These soldiers often accompanied in his walks the exile whom they guarded; they remarked the poignant grief imprinted upon his countenance and his conversation. It is easily conceivable that they would feel strong compassion for this man plunged in such deep disgrace, and that they would especially commiserate his soul, which was soon to appear before God with the responsibility of such a life as his. They would desire to communicate their pious feelings directly to the Emperor, but this was forbidden them. They would then have recourse to Him who is prevented by no barrier from pouring out his Spirit. They would pray Him to soothe the severe and long-continued sufferings of the prisoner by the heavenly peace which the knowledge of Jesus Christ imparts.

Were these fervent and persevering prayers wholly lost? The effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much," says an apostle (James v. 16). It is also written; "Ask and ye shall receive." Was it not affecting to see these Christian soldiers besieging the throne of mercy for the old and unfortunate captain, dying in exile after having conquered Europe? and may not the Lord have been touched with compassion?

Lastly (and this is the most interesting fact in my communication), a journal lately publishes a conversation related by *Comte de Montholon*, the faithful friend of the emperor. Without being responsible for the truth of this conversation as reported, I will copy it literally; and may it have been really uttered by the emperor! It deserves to be read with attention.

"I know men," said Napoleon, "and I tell you that Jesus is not a man!"

"The religion of Christ is a mystery which subsists by its own force, and proceeds from a mind which is not a human mind. We find in it a marked individuality, which originated a train of words and maxims unknown before. Jesus borrowed nothing from our knowledge. He exhibited in himself the perfect example of his precepts. Jesus is not a philosopher; for his proofs are miracles, and from the first his disciples adored him. In fact, learning and philosophy are of no use for salvation; and Jesus came into the world to reveal the mysteries of heaven and the laws of the Spirit.

"Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne and myself, founded empires; but upon what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him.

"It was not a day or a battle which achieved the triumph of the Christian religion in the world. No, it was a long war, a contest for three centuries, begun by the apostles, then continued by the flood of Christian generations. In this war, all the kings and potentates of earth were on one side; on the other, I see no army, but a mysterious force, some men scattered here and there in all parts of the world, and who have no other rallying point than a common faith in the mysteries of the cross.

"I die before my time, and my body will be given back to the earth to become food for worms. Such is the fate which so soon awaits him who has been called the great Napoleon. What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved and adored, and which is extending over the whole earth! Call you this dying? is it not living rather? The death of Christ is the death of a God!"

Napoleon stooped at these last words; but general Bertrand making no reply, the emperor added: "If you do not perceive that Jesus Christ is God, I did wrong to appoint you general."

If this language was really uttered by Napoleon, it forms a fine chapter in the defence of Christianity, for which we are indebted to the greatest warrior of modern times; and it may be believed, without any violence, that the prisoner of St. Helena understood and embraced, in his last days, the truths of salvation.

Upon his death-bed, he often pronounced the name of the Saviour. Was this too an evidence of his faith in Christ? No human being may answer decidedly this question. After having faithfully collected these various indications, we must leave the subject in the hands of God.

I am, &amp;c.,

G. DE F.